

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

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R 110900Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6826

INFOHUFHRS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 558

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USMISSION USUN NY

CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0043

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MO

SUBJECT: EX-SAHARA: PRESS COVERAGE OF POLISARIOACTIVITIES

REF: 76 ALGIERS 2943

1. WE READ WITH GREAT INTEREST TWO ARTICLES ON WESTERN SAHARA APPEARING IN INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS RECENTLY ARRIVED IN NOUAKCHOTT: (A) "INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE" OF DEC. 30, ARTICLE ON PAGE TWO ENTITLED "WEST SAHARA GUERRILLAS HARRY MOROCCANS AND MAURITANIANS", BY BRITISH FREELANCE JOURNALIST SADIE WYKEHAM, DATELINED "ECHIDIRAH, WESTERN SAHAR"(AND POSSIBLY DISTRIBUTED BY NEW YORK TIMES SERVICE); AND (B) ARTICLE (WITH MAP) ENTITLED "SHADOWY WAR IN THE
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SAHARA", BASED ON REPORT FILED BY CORRESPONDENT DAVID BECKWITH, APPEARING ON PAGES 48-50 OF JAN. 3 INTERNATIONAL EDITION OF "TIME". BOTH ARTICLES ARE BASED ON FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS OF EXPERIENCES BECKWITH AND WYKEHAM HAD WHILE ACCOMPANYING GASARIO RAIDING PARTIES AGAINST MOROCCAN OUTPOSTS IN WESTERN SAHARA. THESE PRESUMABLY ACCURATE FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS PROVIDE INVALUABLE INSIGHT INTO CURRENT CAPABILI-

TIES, OPERATIONS AND ATTITUDES OF POLISARIO GUERILLAS.

2. PUTTING TO ONE SIDE CERTAIN STATISTICS PRESENTED IN RESPECTIVE ARTICLES, SUCH AS CASUALTY COUNTS, WHICH WE CONSIDER TO BE SPECULATIVE AT BEST, WE WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS TWO INACCURACIES PRESENTED AS FACT WHICH DIRECTLY AFFECT MAURITANIA, PARTICULARLY SINCE NEITHER JOURNALIST APPARENTLY HAD OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT NOUAKCHOTT.

A. IN "TIME" ARTICLE, MAP DEPICTING PREVIOUS POLISARIO RAIDS INDICATE THAT POLISARIO HAS STRUCK IN SOUTHWESTERN MAURITANIA, SOMEWHERE IN VICINITY OF ROSSO (16 30N 15 49W). SIMILARLY, WYKEHAM STATES THAT (POLISARIO) HAD ..."EVEN HIT POSITIONS NEAR MAURITANIA'S FRONTIERS WITH SENEGAL AND MALI". NEITHER WE NOR ANY OTHER LOCAL SAHARA WATCHERS WITH WHOM WE DISCUSSED MILITARY ACTIVITIES ARE AWARE OF ANY POLISARIO ACTIVITY ANYWHERE SOUTH OF NOUAKCHOTT OR ALONG MAURITANIAN SENEGALESE BORDER IN SOUTHWEST MAURITANIA. NE'MA (16 08N 07 14W) WHICH WAS HIT ONCE IS IN FAR SOUTHEAST NEAR MALI FRONTIER.

B. BECKWITH, WHO APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MORE CAUGHT UP IN POLISARIO ADVENTURE AND GLAMOR THAN WYKEHAM, REPORTS ON PAGE 59 THAT "THEY (POLISARIO) HAVE BROUGHT MAURITANIA CLOSE TO ECONOMIC DISASTER WITH PERIODIC ATTACKS ON THE 450-MILE RAIL LINE, WHICH BRINGS THE COUNTRY'S IRON ORE TO THE SEA.

3. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT IRON ORE EX-
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PORTS ACCOUNT FOR ROUGHLY 65 PERCENT OF MAURITANIA'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT IT HAS BEEN GIRM POLICY FOR PAST YEAR AND HALF TO MAINTAIN A STOCKPILE OF APPROXIMATELY ONE AND ONE-HALF MILLION TONS OF IRON ORE IN NOUADHIBOU. WHAT BEGAN AS EFFORT TO SMOOTH OUT IMPACT ON PACE AND LEVEL OF MINING ACTIVITIES OF FLUCTUATING SALES AND SHIPMENTS IN UNCERTAIN INTERNATIONAL MARKET HAS BECOME IN ADDITION A HEDGE AGAINST SHORT-TERM STOPPAGE OF RAIL SHIPMENTS BY POLISARIO. SENIOR OFFICIALS OF SNIM (GIRM INDUSTRIAL HOLDING COMPANY), WHICH CONTROLS IRON ORE OPERATIONS, RECENTLY STATED HIS COMPANY WAS ATTEMPTING TO INCREASE STOCKPILED IRON ORE IN NOUADHIBOU TO AROUND TWO MILLION TONS. GIVEN PACE OF SALES (AVERAGE MONTHLY LOADINGS TOTAL ONE MILLION TONS) AND CAPACITY OF LOADING FACILITIES AT NOUADHIBOU, AND USING ONE AND ONE-HALF MILLION TONS AS AMOUNT OF ORE STOCKPILED AT ANY GIVEN TIME, WE ESTIMATE IT WOULD TAKE MINIMUM OF SIX WEEKS FOR NOUADHIBOU IRON ORE STOCKS TO BE COMPLETELY DEPLETED. IN OTHER WORDS, POLISARIO,

BY ATTACKING AND POSSIBLY DISRUPTING RAIL LINE FOR ONE
OR TWO DAYS, WOULD NOT SERIOUSLYMFSRUPT SNIM IRON ORE
OPERATIONS. IF POLISARIO DESIRES TO "CRIPPLE" MAURITAN-
IAN ECONOMY (AND WE WONDER WHETHER
ALGERIA WOULD ALLOW THEM TO ATTEMPT THAT), THEY WOULD NEED
TO CUT RAIL LINE OR TOTALLY DISRUPT MINING AND SHIPPING
OPERATIONS OVER PERIOD OF SEVERAL WEEKS. EVEN SHOULBTTHEY
BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE THAT TANTALIZING OBJECTIVE, POLISARIO
WOULD STILL HAVE TO FIND WAY TO DISRUPT CASH FLOW OF TENS
OF MILLIONS OF PETRODOLLARS WHICH SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT,
QATAR AND THE EMIRATES HAVE DIRECTED TO MAURITANIA OVER
THE PAST YEAR OR TWO.

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